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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

CHINA'S SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

by

Tyler J. Moore

June 2011

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CHINA'S SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
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ABSTRACT

The current (2010) National Security Strategy (NSS) states that: “We will monitor China’s military modernization program and prepare accordingly to ensure that U.S. interests and allies, regionally and globally, are not negatively affected.” This thesis assesses a major element of that goal. As our president’s NSS points out, an understanding of how the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) operates is critically important to the American assessment of its own security posture in Asia.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMC	Central Military Commission
CSL	Cooperative Security Location
DoD	Department of Defense
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief
IO	Information Operations
KMT	Kuomintang
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
MR	Military Regions
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations

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I. INTRODUCTION

The current (2010) National Security Strategy (NSS) states that: “We will monitor China’s military modernization program and prepare accordingly to ensure that U.S. interests and allies, regionally and globally, are not negatively affected.”¹ This thesis assesses a major element of that goal. As our president’s NSS points out, an understanding of how the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) operates is critically important to the American assessment of its own security posture in Asia.

In 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld remarked: “Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing [military] investment?”² Despite assurances from the leadership of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) that its military modernization program is committed to peace and stability, many outsiders remain skeptical of growing Chinese power. However, one way to gain insight into the PRC’s intentions is to study its recent history and current strategy.

History shows that the PRC balances against what it perceives as hegemony by seeking assistance from other regional powers and altering its defense strategy to deal with major security threats. Current PLA doctrine and capabilities show that Beijing seeks regional dominance through a strategy of anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) in order to defend the homeland and ensure security interests at home and abroad. The PRC’s former and current defense strategies show that Beijing’s perception of the United States as a major security threat is driving PLA modernization efforts and influencing America’s security posture in Asia. This is one of the most important issues facing the U.S. military today.

¹ President Barak Obama, National Security Strategy (May 2010), 43.

² Donald Rumsfeld, speech at the United States Embassy of Singapore 4 June 2005. <http://singapore.usembassy.gov/060405.html>.

A. AMERICA'S PERSPECTIVE

A recent article by Robert Kaplan outlines China's growing regional ambitions and even provides a map of anticipated power projection goals.³ Kaplan's article references John Mearsheimer, who predicts an inevitable military conflict between the United States and China.⁴ Bill Gertz describes China as "the most serious national security threat the United States faces at present and will remain so into the foreseeable future."⁵ Finally, Steven Mosher argues that: "The Communist Party leadership is engaged in a long-term struggle with the United States for world hegemony."⁶ Concern about China is growing in America in large part because of the recent difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the continuing U.S. recession, and the PRC's accumulation of U.S. national debt. The apprehension surrounding China is understandable; China is growing economically, modernizing militarily, and gaining international significance. However, most Western media naturally tend to promote an alarmist tone when addressing the China threat in an attempt to deliver the most interesting and compelling story possible.

Admittedly, Western media are not always the best source of systematic and disinterested analysis. The best articulation of the "academic" version of the PLA modernization debate is provided by Aaron Friedberg and Robert Ross.⁷ Both authors are accomplished professors at well-known universities who agree on many aspects of China's rise, yet they have very different views on China's military threat. Friedberg views China as a menace that must be simultaneously engaged with and balanced against to ensure that America's regional influence is not degraded. Ross views the immediacy of China's military threat as a myth and argues that the measures proposed by Friedberg are already in progress.

³ Robert Kaplan "The Geography of Chinese Power; How Far Can Beijing Reach on Land and at Sea?" *Foreign Affairs* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, May/June 2010), 27.

⁴ John Mearshimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* (Apr 2006): 160–162.

⁵ Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Threatens America* (Washington, D.C., Regency, 2000), 199.

⁶ Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), VIII.

⁷ Aaron Friedberg and Robert Ross, "Here Be Dragons," *The National Interest* (2009), 19–34.

The difference between China's military threat as a menace or a myth is certainly significant, but also subtle. Most academics agree with Friedberg and Ross that China's economy and military are growing at an impressive pace, but determining Beijing's intentions for the PLA remains highly contested. Much research has been devoted lately to the PLA's emerging military capabilities, but there is little objective analysis that explains the driving forces behind China's strategic change or current military modernization efforts.

Understanding how the PLA leadership views China's security situation is critical to understanding current modernization efforts. Dennis Blasko outlines the PLA's history and military philosophy, and also describes its equipment, organization, training, and employment.⁸ David Shambaugh analyzes the evolving civil-military relationships and points out gaps between theory and aspirations and actual PLA capabilities.⁹ Both of these authors discuss China's threat perceptions, which they conclude are derived from a tenuous domestic situation, an extensive border area and a complex maritime region that is critical to China's industrial backbone. They also agree that China's military has made considerable progress in recent decades, but the PLA has a long way to go until it poses a serious threat to the United States.

The forces that cause large-scale change in PLA strategy are important to understanding the purpose behind emerging capabilities and doctrine. Nan Li's analysis shows that in the mid-1980s the PLA leadership redefined China's security environment by determining that a great power war between China and either the Soviet Union or the United States was unlikely.¹⁰ This allowed the PLA to implement radical new policy changes that reduced the size of the PLA and emphasized being prepared to fight "local, limited war."

⁸ Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–182.

⁹ David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–355.

¹⁰ Nan Li, "Organizational Changes of the PLA, 1985–1997" *The China Quarterly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Jun 1999), 314–349; for doctrinal development see: Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy, and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective" *The China Quarterly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 179–199.

Paul Godwin explores China's strategy and doctrine as a way of understanding China's security concerns and concludes that the PLA will emphasize the high-technology of information warfare and anti-satellite capability to mitigate the American capabilities demonstrated in Operation Desert Storm.¹¹ This analysis is important because it picks up where Li's left off and is one of the first to address the PLA's shift into its current strategy of being prepared to fight "local, limited war under conditions of informatization".

Thomas Christiansen also offers an early assessment of China's then emerging strategy of countering U.S. high-technology with relatively low-technology weapons.¹² Unlike many popular Western publications or authors, Christiansen rejects the notion of China as an emerging superpower or peer competitor with the United States, but he does point out that the PLA can pose problems to the U.S. military without reaching parity in any category.

Determining how China prioritizes its force procurement and what capabilities it needs to develop can indicate how the PLA intends to implement state power abroad. David Shambaugh concludes that China's military power projection capabilities will steadily improve but not to the extent that America's regional interests will necessarily be threatened.¹³ This was reaffirmed by Admiral Dennis Blair, who also pointed out that ambiguous intentions were a major obstacle to creating security communities in East Asia.¹⁴ As the former commander-in-chief of U.S. Pacific Forces, Admiral Blair's remarks deserve special attention.

¹¹ Paul Godwin, conference draft for *The PLA and Chinese Society in Transition* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2001).

¹² Thomas Christiansen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up; China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy" *International Security* (2001), 5–40.

¹³ Shambaugh, "China's Military Modernization: Making Steady and Surprising Progress" *Strategic Asia 2005-2006* (2006), 67–103.

¹⁴ Dennis Blair, John Handley, "From Wheels to Webs: Reconstruction Asia-Pacific Security Arrangements" *The Washington Quarterly* (2001), 7–9.

However, as Timperlake and Triplett point out, Admiral Blair also said “Taiwan is the turd in the punchbowl of U.S.-China relations.”¹⁵ Their point was that while China’s power projection goals are limited, they pose an increasing and imminent threat to Taiwan and America’s regional influence by extension. Michael O’Hanlon and Richard Bush disagree and argue that the PLA do not possess the necessary forces to establish air superiority, conduct an amphibious landing, or reinforce its initial foothold on Taiwan.¹⁶ Analyzing the type and scope of military capabilities on both sides of the Taiwan Straits can help to determine the intentions of the PLA modernization efforts.

B. CHINA’S PERSPECTIVE

Despite China’s abysmal history of open political discourse in academia, many Chinese scholars have recently published a wide range of opinions concerning the future of China’s security environment. Li Jijun, the deputy commandant of China’s Academy of Military Sciences, points out that “globalization is not Westernization”¹⁷ This observation is an important starting point for understanding the an emerging nationalistic attitude toward the U.S. that is shared by many Chinese authors.

Written in 1996, *China Can Say No* was a popular book that expressed Chinese nationalism and opposed Western domination of Chinese affairs.¹⁸ Written among a backdrop of rising Chinese economic strength, the third Taiwan Straits Crisis, and U.S. opposition to WTO membership, the contributors struck a chord with many Chinese citizens. However, the 2009 sequel, *Unhappy China*, lacked the success of its predecessor, implying that the title may not accurately convey the sentiment of the people

¹⁵ Edward Timperlake and William Triplett, *Red Dragon Rising; Communist China’s Military Threat to America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc., 1999). Admiral Blair’s quote is found on 151.

¹⁶ Richard Bush and Michael O’Hanlon, *A War Like No Other; The Truth about China’s Challenge to America* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2007), 187–195.

¹⁷ Li Jijun, “Need To Bolster Traditional, Non-traditional Security,” *Beijing Liaowang* [Beijing Magazine] (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 2004), 7.

¹⁸ Song Qiang, *et al.*, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu—Lengzhanhou shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze* [China Can Say No—the Political and Emotional Choice in the post-Cold War era], (Beijing: Zhonghua Nonggongshang Lianhe Press, 1996), 25–28, 50, 230.

after all.¹⁹ While the intensity and target of Chinese national pride can be debated, the sheer size of China's population, a growing tendency to demonstrate publicly, and the CCP's preoccupation with ensuring social stability all highlight the potential magnitude of China's nationalism.

PLA Colonels Huang Xing and Zuo Quandian state that "our enemy's high-tech weapons and equipment are not flawless, but have some weaknesses and shortcomings."²⁰ This is alarming not only because two PLA officers clearly describe the United States as an enemy, but also because they apparently validate the findings of Shambaugh, Blasko, Blair, and Christensen by describing a strategy of countering U.S. technology with low-tech weapons that are good enough to do so.

Gu Guoliang from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences advocates for the simultaneous expansion of PLA nuclear forces and diplomatic efforts to limit other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons or material. This recommendation was reached by an analysis of recent (2002) shifts in U.S. policy and intends to "stop the U.S. trend of unilateralism, and to establish a fair and just international arms control mechanism with unified standards within the framework of the United Nations."²¹ While the initial emphasis is on countering U.S. capability, the subtle shift to other means of employing national power is significant. In China, the concept of comprehensive national power includes not only military prowess, but also cultural and economic forces as well.

Tang Shiping, a scholar with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, predicts that a relative increase in China's regional influence will coincide with a relative decrease of U.S. influence. However, he further explains that: "This will certainly not mean that

¹⁹ Song Qian, *Unhappy China—The Great Time, Grand Vision and Our Challenges* (Beijing: Zhang Xiaobo, 2009).

²⁰ Senior Colonels Huang Xing and Zuo Quandian, "Holding the Initiative in Our Hands in Conducting Operations, Giving Full Play to Our Own Advantages To Defeat Our Enemy—A Study of the Core Idea of the Operational Doctrine of the People's Liberation Army" *Beijing Zhongguo Junshi Kexue [Chinese Military Science]* (Beijing: Academy of Military Science 1996), 7. In the same paragraph, Xing points out weaknesses with the F-117 bomber, Tomahawk cruise missile, AH-64 helicopter, and the U.S. DoD computer network. Clearly, the enemy he describes is the U.S.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

some other big power country could take over the position which the United States has.”²² Not only does Tang discuss the security concerns on China’s periphery, he also highlights the growing importance of international public opinion and advocates for an expanded role of Chinese media. This is especially interesting because the emphasis is not on some enlightened view of freedom of speech, but rather on increasing state power. According to Tang, “A China which has no influence on international media would not be a big power in the true sense of the term.”²³ This emerging strategy of employing soft power to project state power has a foundation in the PLA’s doctrine.

The “three warfares” are described as the psychological, media, and legal dimensions of conflict.²⁴ While the doctrine of “three warfares” has not been comprehensively designed and implemented across the PLA, there are recent examples of soft power employment.²⁵ The *PLA Daily* boasts that China has sent 15,603 soldiers to participate in 18 separate UN peace missions since 1990.²⁶ Statistically, this figure is unremarkable when compared to U.S. force deployments. However, the type of missions that the PLA seems eager to undertake may be more important than the number of troops committed overseas.

UN peace missions receive a lot of media attention even if the number of troops and amount of money committed is relatively low. Peace missions may be a more useful way of employing soft power than the deployment of an aircraft carrier, for example.

²² Tang Shiping, “China’s Peripheral Security Environment in 2010-2015—Decisive Factors, Trends and Prospects.” *Beijing Zhanlue yu Guanli* [Beijing Institute for Asia-Pacific Studies] (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2002), 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁴ Information Office of the State Council, *China’s National Defense in 2008*, (Beijing: State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2009), 8.

²⁵ The 2009 OSD report to Congress also articulates the PLA’s concept of the *three warfares*: Psychological, Media, and Legal Warfare. This roughly mirrors current U.S. IO doctrine (*Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations*, 2006) which includes cyber attack and defense, military deception, electronic warfare, psychological operations, operational security, and public affairs. However, the United States has had *much* more employment experience than China has.

²⁶ Chen Jie, “China Sends 15,603 Soldiers on UN Peace Missions in 20 Years,” *PLA Daily* (Beijing: China Military Online, 2010) http://eng.mod.gov.cn/SpecialReports/2010-07/07/content_4211551.htm

Most importantly, these missions and the “three warfares” doctrine comprise an asymmetrical approach designed to mitigate the overwhelming technological advantage of the United States military.

A Chinese strategy of A2/AD requires both hard and soft power employment and emphasizes asymmetry. Parity between conventional or nuclear forces is not an immediate priority. Instead, the PLA seeks to influence the regional situation to prevent conflict with the United States if possible, and to achieve swift, decisive, limited victories if necessary. Although there is much disagreement about the peaceful nature of China’s rise, the official position from Beijing is to work with, not against, Washington. The Chinese foreign minister recently stated: “Generally, the Chinese-U.S. relationship has grown at a steady pace. We are willing to enhance contact and cooperation on international and regional issues with the U.S. through dialogue and exchange at various levels.”²⁷ Despite these assurances, Beijing is developing a strategy designed to limit U.S. influence in the western Pacific.

C. CONCLUSION

The scope of this thesis is limited to understanding China’s historical security perspective, current PLA modernization efforts, and implications for America’s future security posture in Asia. In order to understand why the PRC perceives the United States as a major security threat and how this perception is driving PLA modernization efforts, China’s military history and current defense strategy are analyzed. First, China’s evolution of military strategy is examined in Chapter II in order to understand what factors drive changes within the PLA. Second, the current grand strategy of the PLA is examined in Chapter III in order to understand what the existing doctrine and capabilities of the PLA are. This analysis aims to clarify China’s defense policy and military modernization program in order to identify implications for American interests and develop options for American policymakers.

²⁷ Mo Hong’e, “China-U.S. ties should be cooperative, not zero-sum: Chinese FM,” *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency Inc., 1 Dec 2010), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-12/01/c_13630589.htm,

II. EVOLUTION OF CHINESE MILITARY DOCTRINE

In order to understand what drives changes in military doctrine and the development of capabilities, it is useful to understand what factors have typically caused these types of changes in China's recent past. Globally, the CCP acts as a balancer against hegemony. This can be considered the "golden rule" of Chinese foreign policy and accounts not only for Chinese strategic alignment, but also Chinese military strategy as well. If perceived threats cause changes to China's defense strategies, and if China consistently balances against hegemony, then it makes sense that America's unipolarity seems threatening to the PRC and therefore drives PLA modernization efforts. Since 1949, Beijing has adjusted its defense strategies to deal with perceived changes in its threat environment and it currently sees the United States as its primary security threat, mainly because of U.S. involvement in the Taiwan Strait.

A. 1950–1959: ALLIANCE WITH THE SOVIET UNION

[China and the Soviet Union] undertake to carry out jointly all necessary measures within their power to prevent a repetition of aggression and breach of the peace by Japan or any other State which might directly or indirectly join with Japan in acts of aggression.²⁸

The context of this period was one of alliance with, and reliance on, the Soviet Union by the Chinese. American economic and security arrangements with the Republic of China, the Japanese, and eventually the South Koreans, made the United States the main threat to Mao's newly established government. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, offered critical support to Mao from the very beginning of the PRC's consolidation of power in Beijing.

Using 1949 as a starting point is useful because of the transformative nature of the CCP's victory. In the early half of the 20th century, China had witnessed the end of an empire, the rise and fall of regional warlords, subjugation through great power

²⁸ *The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship* (Beijing: 14 Feb 1950), "any other State" was widely understood to be the United States when the treaty was signed.

occupation, war with Japan, and a civil war. After decades of war, China's economy was devastated and the CCP lacked sufficient resources to support, let alone modernize, the PLA. Maintaining a robust military capability was essential to prevent a counterattack from the KMT, the Japanese, the Americans, or an alliance between all three. Furthermore, the PLA needed a sizable force to conduct a major campaign against a UN coalition on the Korean Peninsula.

The Korean War hardened the CCP's alignment with the Soviet Union by ensuring that Western, and especially American, engagement with the PRC would be impossible for decades. Although PLA involvement certainly affected the outcome of the war, the aftermath of the armistice had an ambiguous effect on the PLA and the PRC. On one hand, the PLA had fought the UN coalition to a standstill and ensured the sovereignty of a neighboring communist country. On the other hand, the effectiveness of Western, and especially American, technology had a devastating impact on the Chinese and reinforced the reliance on Soviet assistance. Although the PRC may have preferred to develop its own modern military capabilities, it did not have the economic capability or technical skills to do so. At the same time, Beijing still faced what it perceived to be credible and imminent threats from the United States, Japan, and the Republic of China.

Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 meant that Mao would have to establish a new relationship with his successor to ensure continued Soviet assistance. Although the relationship started out well, Khrushchev's anti-Stalin statements and policies soon made Mao uneasy. Adding to Mao's skepticism was the Taiwan Strait crisis that began in 1958. Although there was little change between Mainland China and Taiwan in terms of casualties or territory following the crisis, the response by the respective superpowers had a lasting impression on both Chiang and Mao. The immediate and credible response by the U.S. 7th Fleet demonstrated an American willingness to intervene and nuclear weapons were even discussed as an option. Arguably more important for Mao however, was the lack of response from the USSR. Whether the Soviets had no intention of responding or were simply unprepared to do so may be irrelevant, the fact that the Soviets did not show up when the Americans did fueled Mao's growing anxiety over continued Soviet assistance.

B. 1959–LATE 1970s: PEOPLE’S WAR

Not only must we have a powerful regular army, we must also organize contingents of the people’s militia on a big scale. This will make it difficult for the imperialists to move a single inch in our country in the event of invasion.²⁹

A common misconception about Mao is that he always favored guerrilla warfare over conventional warfare. During the war against Japan, Mao declared: “Our strategy should be to employ our main forces to operate over an extended and fluid front.”³⁰ This was known as mobile warfare which contrasted with positional warfare and sought to maximize China’s vast territory to overextend and exploit Japan’s lines of communication. Mao summarized the primacy of mobile warfare over guerrilla warfare during a series of talks in 1938:

Among the forms of warfare in the anti-Japanese war mobile warfare comes first and guerrilla warfare second. When we say that in the entire war mobile warfare is primary and guerrilla warfare supplementary, we mean that the outcome of the war depends mainly on regular warfare, especially in its mobile form, and that guerrilla warfare cannot shoulder the main responsibility in deciding the outcome.³¹

For Mao, revolutionary warfare was divided into three phases: The strategic defensive, the strategic consolidation or stalemate, and the strategic counter-offensive.³² During much of Mao’s lifetime, and throughout most of his military campaigns, guerrilla warfare was extensively used because it was the only realistic option for the PLA. The Sino-Soviet alliance gave Mao the opportunity to advance beyond guerrilla warfare and modernize the military. However, the Sino-Soviet split left Mao bereft of any significant external assistance and forced him to rely on domestic production for military modernization.

²⁹ Mao Zedong, *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, 29 Sept 1958), <http://art-bin.com/art/omao8.html>.

³⁰ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 171.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

³² *Ibid.*, 137.

The years 1949 through 1959 can be described as a period of “Sino-Soviet alignment” not only because of the formal treaty between the two countries, but also because of China’s dependence on Soviet aid and hostility toward the United States, both of which were magnified by the Korean War. The roots of the Sino-Soviet split are somewhat ambiguous. The death of Josef Stalin in 1953 and eventual ascendancy of Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 probably marks the initial rift between the two countries because of Khrushchev’s apparent break from Stalin’s ideology and policies. Although Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, rapprochement with Yugoslavia, and subsequent dissolution of the Communist Information Bureau were all troubling to Mao, Khrushchev’s 1959 meeting with President Eisenhower emphasized the Soviet Premier’s policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the United States and placed China in a very dangerous position between the two superpowers.

Peaceful coexistence was a dangerous concept for Mao because it meant that Moscow might not come to defend China in the event of a conflict between the PRC and the United States. Therefore, Mao’s ability to rely on Soviet assistance to balance against the U.S. was substantially reduced. By 1965, China faced a militarized border with the Soviet Union to the north and an American build-up in Vietnam to the south. Without Soviet aid or advisors, Mao was forced to turn domestically for a defense strategy. Using the only resources available at the time, a large population and a vast countryside, the PLA altered its strategy to “people’s war” to counter the threat from dual adversaries.

In its preparation for total, protracted war against either superpower, “people’s war” sought to lure the invader deep into China’s territory while trading space for time and even sacrificing industrial cities in an attempt to overextend an opponent’s lines of communication which could then be exploited through mass and mobility. The newly formed PLAAF and PLAN were maintained in support roles and the infantry was considered to be decisive. The emphasis on infantry forces over advanced weaponry is important because it highlights the impact of China’s severe diplomatic and economic isolation during this time.

Under these circumstances, “people’s war” seems to be the least-worst option. China could rely on its sheer size, in terms of people and terrain, in order to trade space

for time in the event of an invasion. This strategy was also necessary because of the lack of any significant regional allies and because of a limited ability to outfit a modern army through domestic production.

C. LATE 1970s–1985: PEOPLE’S WAR UNDER MODERN CONDITIONS

The time has passed when America will make every other nation’s conflict our own, or make every other nation’s future our responsibility, or presume to tell the people of other nations how to manage their own affairs.³³

Unlike the 1950s, in which China relied on Soviet assistance for its security posture and military modernization program, this period saw Beijing tilt toward Washington as it perceived the USSR as its main security threat. Strategic collaboration with the United States, along with an American withdrawal from Vietnam, allowed Beijing to concentrate its defense strategy against the Soviet military along the northern border. Furthermore, China’s access to Western technological assistance allowed it to reinvigorate its military modernization program. This modernization effort required the abandonment of “people’s war” for the new strategy of “people’s war under modern conditions.”

Although the name sounds similar, the doctrine broke from Mao’s strategy in a number of ways. Instead of abandoning industrial centers in an effort to trade space for time, the PLA now intended to meet an invading force in the border regions using “positional defensive warfare,” which required combined arms in addition to infantry and guerilla tactics.³⁴ In order to execute this change in defense strategy, China equipped the PLA with modern weaponry and professionalized the force.

Introducing modern weaponry meant new complementary roles for the PLAAF and PLAN. Professionalizing the force meant not only de-emphasizing the PLA’s political responsibilities, but also reducing the overall size of the army. Taken together,

³³ Richard Nixon, *Second Inaugural Address* (Washington D.C., 20 Jan 1973).
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixonsecondinaugural.htm>.

³⁴Ellis Joffe, “People’s War under Modern Conditions: A Doctrine for Modern War,” *The China Quarterly* (1987), 560.

these changes represented tectonic shifts in Chinese policy and society. Deng's adept maneuvering amongst these issues was aided by China's access to international markets which dramatically improved the economy in a relatively short time.

The American withdrawal from Vietnam along with an economic recession led to a perception of a reduction of American international influence in the early 1970s, while the growth of the Soviet Red Army and improved civil–military relations indicated rising Soviet power during this same period. Predictably, Beijing tilted towards Washington to prevent Soviet hegemony in Asia.

The scope of change within China resulting from adoption of “people’s war under modern conditions” make it clear that “modern conditions” was the important half of the doctrine and that “people’s war” was retained primarily to lessen the impact of such a dramatic transformation on leaders who served during the Mao era. Although the Soviet threat along China’s northern border was still the PLA’s primary concern, by the mid-1980s Beijing once again revised its defense strategy after analyzing the bipolar dynamic between the two superpowers.

D. 1985–1992: LOCAL, LIMITED WAR

Reform is China’s second revolution.³⁵

During this period the PRC leadership made critical and astute assumptions that paved the way for dramatic increases in Chinese security and prosperity. The assumption that neither superpower would attack or invade China allowed Deng Xiaoping to adopt a strategy, of “local, limited war” and implement further reforms in the PLA. The key difference was Deng’s assumption that conflict between the superpowers was unlikely, an attack on China was unlikely, and that the most likely form of conflict would be small in scale and limited to China’s borders. This led to the provisions for wartime transformation of military regions (MRs) into war zones, within which the conflict would

³⁵ Deng Xiaoping, Excerpt from a talk with Susumu Nikaido, *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily] (Beijing, 28Mar1985), <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1360.html>.

occur. However, this shift also had dramatic implications for force development, including manpower, equipment, training, and planning.

MR commanders controlled all forces within their respective region, including forces from other specialized services like the navy and air force. Therefore, whereas combined arms was introduced to the PLA under “people’s war under modern conditions,” the concept of jointness evolved under the doctrine of “limited war.” “Limited war” also increased the importance of regional centers of power for production, logistics, training, and command and control as opposed to the centralized structure used under the previous strategy.

This decentralization placed greater authority and responsibility on regional commanders but reduced the scope of military operations for the PLA as a whole. No longer would military leaders be required to repel an invasion from a large military of an industrialized power. Instead, quick decisive action against smaller opponents along the border was the focus. This strategy allowed military and political leaders to focus their efforts and resources on economic development without placing China in a security crisis.

The reform policies proved to be extremely effective at improving the economy and modernizing the military. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union created a new batch of problems for China. Although the USSR had been the primary security concern since the 1960s, the Soviet Union was also recognized as the only state capable of balancing against the United States. With this capability removed, America’s already substantial influence in the region would increase.

E. 1992–2003: LOCAL, LIMITED WAR UNDER HIGH TECHNOLOGY CONDITIONS

Science and technology are crucial forces of production. China and its military modernization must depend on the progress of science and technology. The practice of every limited local war, especially the most recent war tells us that modern warfare has become high-tech warfare. It is a multi-dimensional war, electronic war, missile war. The backward

one is beaten...military buildup in peace should take the road of quality...such is our major principle in military modernization.³⁶

This period contains the recent causes of many existing tensions between the United States and China. Although both countries maintained overall friendly relations with each other, both countries also changed their respective perceptions of the other. The PRC re-evaluated the security threat posed by the United States after it became the sole remaining superpower, while the United States altered its view of China after the Tiananmen Square incident. Western arms sanctions, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, and a demonstrated U.S. willingness to employ its military around the globe unilaterally, all contributed to China's growing apprehension over unchecked U.S. power. Despite these various issues, China continued its integration into the world economy as well as domestic economic reforms. Most importantly, the PLA realized that a major war was not imminent and was therefore afforded the opportunity to further modernize the military. This realization gave rise to the emphasis on science and technology and led to a new strategy of "local, limited war under high technology conditions."

Beijing's initial concerns over the U.S.'s primacy in the international system were quickly validated during Operation Desert Storm. In the new unipolar environment, the American leadership was explicit about its intentions of using its position as the only remaining superpower to shape the international system to advance its interests. Once Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, President Bush was prepared to use his peace dividend to repel the Iraqi army from an important Middle Eastern ally. For Beijing the logic was clear: If the United States interfered in Middle Eastern affairs, why not Taiwan, Tibet or North Korea?

Most alarming for China's military leaders was the actual conduct of the American operation which pitted superior U.S. technology against inferior conventional weapons, many of which were Chinese. Most people were stunned by images of guided missiles flying into specific windows on key buildings and by the "highway of death,"

³⁶ Jiang Zemin, *Jiefangjun Bao* [PLA Daily] (Beijing: China Military Online 20 Mar 1991), <http://irchina.org/en/xueren/china/view.asp?id=678>.

which highlighted the devastation of Iraqi armored, mechanized, and motorized forces by American airpower. These images had such an impact on China that the PLA adopted yet another defense strategy that reflected the need to dominate not only with firepower but also with information.

What was clear to the PLA leadership in the early 1990s was that the scope and pace of China's military modernization program was not adequate for the overwhelming capabilities of the United States. Besides announcing a new defense strategy, China accelerated its acquisition of sophisticated military technologies from countries like Israel and especially Russia. As China's military improved technologically and professionally, it also began to broaden its scope of operations by preparing to fight in a multi-dimensional battlespace in air, land, sea, and even space. The new emphasis on science and technology meant that the PLA began to favor machines over man, in stark contrast with "people's war." To counter the growing influence of the United States, China's new strategy would focus on increasing technological production domestically and improving diplomatic relations abroad.

Beijing vigorously sought to technologically improve its military but realized that modernization efforts were falling short after the 1991 Gulf War. Furthermore, concerns over America's tendency to interfere in China's domestic politics spiked sharply in 1995 during the rise of Taiwan's independence politics. Despite great strides in economic development and military modernization, the PLA was still unable to counter the robust expeditionary capabilities of America's military during the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Without any other power capable of, or willing to, counter the influence of the United States, China's perception of the United States as a major security threat was reinforced. Not only did China once again change its military strategy to deal with this threat, it also sought out partners to help balance against it.

F. 2004–PRESENT: LOCAL, LIMITED WAR UNDER CONDITIONS OF INFORMATIZATION

[China and Russia] shall energetically promote the consolidation of stability of the surrounding areas of the two countries, create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust and cooperation, and promote

efforts aimed at setting up a multi-lateral co-ordination mechanism which complies with the actual situation of the above-mentioned areas on issues of security and cooperation.³⁷

The military and military technology cooperation of [China and Russia] carried out in accordance with the relevant agreements are not directed at third countries.³⁸

A new Sino-Russian Treaty was signed in 2001 to solidify the partnership of these two regional powers. Although the 2001 treaty invites comparison with the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950, there is no explicit language obligating each country to the defense of the other. However, the treaty does call for advancing multipolarity globally, a condition that would likely dilute American hegemony. This is not to say that either China or Russia favored conflict or confrontation with the United States. On the contrary, each of these partners heavily relies on the U.S. economically and therefore downplays their respective desires to see a reduced American presence in Asia.

“Local, limited war under conditions of informatization” remains the official strategy of the PLA since 2004. While this new strategy is still emerging and highly conceptual, it is clear that the PLA views information as a critical component to modern warfare. A growing emphasis on cyber and space-based capabilities indicates not only how the PLA intends to fight in the next war, but also what capabilities it expects potential enemies to have.

This situation is certainly complex but makes sense in the current globalized environment. Countries naturally want to promote their interests as much as possible at home and on their periphery. As we have seen, the PRC has always attempted to secure its borders and promote its interests abroad. More importantly, China has always tried to gain as much support as possible to blunt the encroachment of its interests by the most powerful regional actor. Today, the United States is the clear dominant power in the region and therefore an obvious concern for the PRC leadership.

³⁷“Article 14”*Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation* (Moscow: 16 Jul 2001), <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm>.

³⁸ Ibid., Article 7.

Besides alignment with Russia, China has also attempted to garner the support of other regional actors like ASEAN. Beijing has even created institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to secure its economic and security interests. However, balancing against the United States in a globalized environment is more complex than in previous eras. Economic interdependence suggests that China and the United States should put aside their differences in order to mutually prosper. As a balancer against hegemony, China views the United States as its greatest strategic threat outside of its own borders and is refining its military strategy to counter this threat.

From the Chinese perspective, conflict with the United States is not considered to be imminent, nor is it desired. For the PRC the only thing worse than engaging in a conflict with the United States is losing that conflict. The most likely scenario for conflict with the United States is in the Taiwan Straits. Not only has the United States repeatedly interfered in cross-Straits politics throughout the PRC's history, it continues to sell arms to Taiwan and subsequently provoke the current PRC leadership. To mitigate this scenario, the PLA is developing a strategy designed to prevent and discourage the U.S. from military action in the region and to rapidly and decisively win a conflict if necessary.

G. CONCLUSION

The golden rule of China's foreign policy is that China balances against hegemony. Since its inception, the PRC has changed its defense strategy to counter what it perceived to be the dominant regional power and therefore the greatest threat to PRC security. Today, however, without a powerful superpower patron to rely on for security, and given the economic interconnectedness of China and the United States, balancing against hegemony has taken on a different tone. China is not only seeking out alliances to counter U.S. regional influence but also developing a military strategy to resist America's military presence in Asia.

Throughout the evolution of China's military, Taiwan deserves specific attention. American support for the Nationalist regime predates the establishment of the PRC and had a substantial impact on the first cross-Straits crisis in 1954. President Eisenhower's

apparent willingness to consider nuclear weapons in defending the ROC was a direct and serious threat to the PRC's authority and sovereignty. America's subsequent involvement in 1958 displayed a commitment to not only threaten a strike, but to deploy conventional forces as well.

With the latest crisis occurring only 15 years ago and continued arms sales to Taiwan since then, The Taiwan Strait represents a fundamental, persistent, severe, and impending obstacle for Sino-U.S. relations. This is one of the main reasons why the PRC perceives the United States as a major security threat and is developing a strategy to counter American influence in the western Pacific through a strategy of A2/AD. The next chapter describes how China's current defense strategy intends to counter U.S. influence in the region.

Era	Defense Strategy	Security Perspective	PLA Approach
1950-1959	Alliance with the Soviet Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -USA is the main security threat. -Alliance between the United States, the Japanese, and the KMT is the worst case scenario. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Follow Soviet model of professionalization and modernization. -Integrate into Soviet military and security network. -Modernize ground forces and develop PLAN and PLAAF.
1959-Late 1970s	People's War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dual Superpower Adversaries. -Severe diplomatic and economic isolation. -Self reliance in military modernization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Total, protracted war against a technologically superior invader. -Lure enemy in deep, extend lines of communication and exploit with mobile and guerilla warfare. -PLAN and PLAAF in support.
Late 1970s-1985	People's War under Modern Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -USSR is the main threat. -Western technological assistance used for military modernization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“Forward defense” used to stop invaders at the border. -Cities and industrial centers are defended. -Positional warfare and war zones established. -Combined arms. -PLAN and PLAAF in complementary roles.

1985-1992	Local, limited war	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No risk of invasion or attack from either superpower. -Emphasis on economic reforms along the coastal region. -Size of PLA must be reduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limited wars along China's periphery. -“Active defense” to strike quickly and decisively. -Technological upgrade and revived professionalism. -PLAN and PLAAF more important. -Jointness emphasized.
1992-2003	Local, limited war under high-technology conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -American hegemony -Western arms sanctions -Taiwan independence politics -Continued economic reforms and world integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Accelerated acquisition of military technology. -Multi-dimensional air/land/sea/space battlespace. -Reliance on asymmetry against the U.S. military. -Anti-access/area denial systems increasingly employed in the Taiwan Strait.
2004-Present	Local, limited war under conditions of informatization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -U.S. military focused primarily on the Middle East and South Asia. -Reliance on Russian resources, arms, and technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strengthen the alliance with Russia through large-scale exercises. -Increased development of A2/AD systems and “three warfares”.

Figure 1. Timeline of PLA defense strategies. (After: Miller, 2010).

III. CURRENT CHINESE DEFENSE STRATEGY

Impressive economic growth coupled with the largest population in the world inevitably makes China an important factor in the international arena. Geopolitically, China borders the Pacific Ocean and 14 countries, including Russia, Afghanistan, North Korea, India and Pakistan. Diplomatically, China holds one of only five seats as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. All of these factors make China's peaceful rise in recent years one of the most important trends in world affairs.

Understandably, the modernization and development of China's military is a great concern to scholars and policy-makers alike. This concern occasionally leads analysts to conclude that China's rise challenges the United States as the world's only superpower, but there is little evidence to support a global hegemonic agenda by the PLA. Regionally, however, the capabilities of the PLA are considerable and require an inquiry into the intentions of the PLA leadership. In order to discover what Beijing's intentions are, it is important to consider what capabilities are being developed. Conversely, analyzing what capabilities are *not* being developed can lend further insight into what Beijing determines to be *unimportant*, thereby clarifying the overall strategy of the PLA. By examining the improving and emerging capabilities of the PLA, it is clear that Beijing seeks to reduce U.S. influence through a strategy of A2/AD in order to defend the homeland and ensure security interests at home and abroad.

A. ANALYSIS OF MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

China and the PLA face a number of security goals. Defense of the coastal economic heartland rises in priority along with China's powerful industrial sector. The PLA must also resolve territorial conflicts along China's borders quickly and favorably while maintaining readiness to address internal security concerns. Globalization and an increased demand for resources elevate the importance of addressing potential maritime conflicts. Ensuring freedom of movement within strategic sea lines of communication, including the Taiwan Straits, continues to gain importance along with China's dependence on foreign trade. Finally, a modern military advances international prestige

and boosts diplomatic power. As a rising power, China naturally expects to receive the international recognition that accompanies a country that possesses a strong, capable military complete with the ability to conduct Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) and a nuclear second strike.

With this varied and complex range of security goals, the PLA leadership has to adopt a doctrine that is flexible and comprehensive. China's current doctrine is self-described as "local, limited war under informatization."³⁹ This replaced "local, limited war under high-technology conditions" in 1993 after witnessing the effectiveness of the United States military in the Gulf War with Iraq. The biggest difference between these two approaches to military development is the emphasis on the effects of information. Many analysts believe that China's focus on information operations (IO) can provide the PLA with the immediate ability to disrupt or defeat enemies that rely heavily on high-technology, like the United States.

Within "local war under informatization," a strategy of A2/AD is the main thrust of the PLA's recent modernization efforts. A key indicator for the development of an A2/AD strategy is the development of missiles, submarines, fighter aircraft, and anti-aircraft weapons. Each of these systems provides a very limited and specific capability. Although these systems can influence key terrain, they cannot occupy it. As a result, these enhanced systems give the PLA a robust A2/AD capability, but do not provide for a wider range of military options. Intelligence collection, military diplomacy, and many aspects of MOOTW remain unaddressed by developing these systems. A narrow scope of operations limits a military's flexibility and reduces overall competence.

By sacrificing flexibility and a wider range of military operations, the PLA is able to focus on the development of a comprehensive approach to A2/AD. Besides the overall emphasis on A2/AD systems development, each branch of service has undertaken responsibilities that focus primarily on A2/AD. The ground forces are moving away from static garrisons in the military regions towards a more mobile force able to quickly reinforce along China's periphery. The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF)

³⁹Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2008* (2009): 8.

has a lead role in joint anti-air raid campaigns, a cornerstone of A2/AD. The People's Liberation Navy (PLAN) has three main missions: resist seaborne aggression, protect national sovereignty, and safeguard maritime rights.⁴⁰ With the recent acquisition of submarines, advanced naval mines, and anti-ship ballistic missiles, the PLAN is taking a key role in A2/AD.

Besides the focus of the three branches of the PLA, substantial resources have been devoted to the development of missiles, space warfare, integrated network electronic warfare, and IO. These enabling capabilities combined with the primary roles of the services provide a doctrinal template for PLA operations against a peer competitor like the United States. Ostensibly in a Taiwan Strait scenario, a conflict with the PLA would most likely commence with a non-kinetic attack on electronic, computer, and space based systems followed by positioning of and targeting by kinetic A2/AD systems along with simultaneous psychological, media, and legal warfare operations designed to deter continued involvement by U.S. or allied forces.⁴¹

Although a robust A2/AD capability greatly threatens freedom of movement in the region, what is noticeably absent from the PLA's agenda is development of the ability to counter-attack or project power beyond the shores of the mainland. Despite having the most populous military in the world, the PLAAF has the ability to lift only 5,000 troops at a time.⁴² By emphasizing A2/AD and the joint anti-air raid campaign, the PLAAF is deficient in strategic mobility beyond China's borders. The PLA ground forces are able to respond to locations within China's borders, but as recent relief efforts have shown, response abroad is extremely limited and even reaching remote locations within China's

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress, Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2009*(Washington D.C., Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2009), 11.

⁴¹ The 2009 OSD report to Congress articulates the PLA's concept of the "three warfares": Psychological, Media, and Legal Warfare. It is important to note that U.S. doctrine articulates national power through Diplomacy, Information, Military Strength, and Economics. Furthermore, current U.S. IO doctrine (*Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations*, 2006) includes cyber attack and defense, military deception, electronic warfare, psychological operations, operational security, and public affairs. The difference is that the United States has employed its current IO doctrine in various recent campaigns whereas the PLA only has its theory.

⁴² International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010*, (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 402.

borders remains problematic as well.⁴³ The PLAN can accomplish its missions near the Chinese coast but has a limited capacity to project power and is noticeably not seeking an amphibious capability. These systems and capabilities demonstrate that Beijing is primarily concerned with providing homeland defense through a strategy of A2/AD. This strategy can be very effective at defeating local, limited threats on or near China's homeland by restricting enemy freedom of movement near China. Operational reach, however, is limited to the area surrounding China's periphery commonly referred to as the second island chain. Power projection capabilities are extremely limited and currently under-prioritized in PLA doctrine and acquisition programs.

B. OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The biggest obstacles faced by the PLA are the civil-military relationship with the CCP, the lack of operationally experienced leadership, and a limited range of military operations. The Tiananmen Square Crisis of 1989 shows that military leaders may question the orders of civilian leaders within the Central Military Commission and those civilian leaders may not fully understand how to properly employ military forces. This rift raised questions of party loyalty among military members and created an unproductive focus on adherence to communist ideals. Focusing on political ideology distracts the military member from training requirements and limits proficiency. Furthermore, the commissar system dilutes the authority of commanders, especially commanders of combat forces like infantry, artillery or tank units. If military doctrine is going to rely on fewer, highly-specialized, better trained troops, it must devote as much time as possible to professional development. The CCP currently hampers professional development and therefore the overall readiness of the PLA.

Since withdrawing from Vietnam in 1973, the United States has conducted over 100 military operations across the globe, ranging from humanitarian assistance and

⁴³ Nirav Patel, "Chinese Disaster Relief Operations," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Norfolk, VA: National Defense University Press, 2009), 111–117.

disaster relief to high intensity conventional combat.⁴⁴ China's 1979 incursion into northern Vietnam was its last significant military operation. Operational experience is critical to development. Obviously important to the leaders and troops who executed the mission, operational experience also provides lessons to the organizations and institutions involved as well. Without the ability to refine doctrine, strategy, operational design or small unit tactics through real-world experience, the PLA will have an inaccurate assessment of its capabilities. This miscalculation impairs the ability of PRC leadership to appropriately task the PLA and restricts the PLA's ability to conduct operations effectively and efficiently.

A2/AD limits the overall range of military operations the PLA can perform. Widening the range of operations requires the development of additional capabilities besides A2/AD, mainly in the form of transportation and sustainment of troops. Transport aircraft need to be developed in order to train for airborne and expeditionary operations. Aerial refueling must also be developed to enhance strategic mobility. More importantly, if the PLA wants to project power beyond its own borders a basing system with other countries needs to be developed. Without international agreements with allied countries, the PLA will be unable to adequately sustain its ground forces once they are deployed or inserted into a given location.

The development of amphibious shipping is essential to power projection and currently ignored by the PLAN. Forward deployed forces dramatically widen the range of military operations. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, military diplomacy through training exercises, and security and stability operations are all facilitated by maintaining an amphibious force in readiness. However, the development of amphibious ships would certainly raise concerns about China's intentions toward Taiwan and could degrade relations with the United States as well.

Despite many domestic and international obstacles, the PRC has some unique opportunities as well. China's continued economic growth is the PLA's best asset right

⁴⁴ Richard F. Grimmett, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad 1789-2009* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 12–30.
<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32170.pdf>

now and is essential to modernization efforts. After decades of solid double-digit growth in GDP, the PRC is able to shift focus from the agricultural, industrial, and technological sectors towards the military. While this adjustment will definitely improve the quality and quantity of material, the PLA leadership must ensure that a coherent and comprehensive doctrine that promotes overall strategic security goals drives research, development, and procurement.

One pitfall of a strong industrial sector is the potential for industry to employ political action in order to advance its own agenda. In his final speech as president, Dwight Eisenhower warned the United States that: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”⁴⁵ As China’s own military-industrial complex matures and gains influence, civilian and military leaders must ensure that they are the ones formulating policy, and that industry is appropriately addressing their needs.

The biggest opportunity that is currently not being exploited is China’s friendly association with the United States. Despite ideological contradictions, China and the United States have a much more open and accepting relationship than other communist countries like North Korea, Cuba, or Venezuela. Unlike the Cold War, there is no imminent threat of nuclear war or proxy wars fought in peripheral countries like Korea, Vietnam, or Afghanistan. In fact, there are many areas in which the United States and the PLA could combine efforts.

By reinforcing NATO in counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, the PLA could gain relevant operational experience and form alliances with professional modern militaries like Australia, Germany, and the United States. Anti-piracy operations also provide a context for the PLA to interact with other regional militaries. Finding common ground to work with other military forces is possible despite political and ideological differences.

⁴⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower. *Military-Industrial Complex Speech* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1960). <http://www.britannica.com/bps/additionalcontent/8/116869/Document-Dwight-D-Eisenhower-Farewell-Address>,

Military diplomacy is critical to enhancing transparency and essential in promoting a dialogue between potential allies. Without the polarity that existed during the Cold War, military diplomacy remains an unrealized opportunity. Prioritizing military diplomacy would enhance non-material related modernization efforts of the PLA and promote China's influence in world affairs.

C. IMPLICATIONS

China's current strategy of A2/AD is intended to protect the homeland, especially the coastal economic heartland, and local regional interests like strategic sea lines of communication. However, a comprehensive and robust ability to dominate freedom of movement can upset the regional balance of power. In order for the balance of power to dramatically shift in favor of the PRC certain conditions must be present. First, the United States needs to withdraw from the region, either voluntarily or through coercion. Also, neighboring countries must be militarily outclassed. Finally, China must ensure that Russia continues to supply the PLA with weapons and equipment while maintaining current levels of high economic growth and stability.

On the first two counts conditions are not currently set, nor are they likely to be in the near future. The United States maintains a great interest in Asia and will continue operations and exercises in theater. As the recent resignation of the Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama shows, allied countries like Japan and South Korea still count on the U.S. Military for security and economic development. Meanwhile, the United States continues to enhance the capabilities and diplomatic relationships with our regional allies who in turn develop their own sophisticated, capable militaries.

On the second two counts, continued Russian arms deals and continued economic growth, the future is less clear. Any number of events could disrupt the Russian supply line of weapons and equipment. Alliances or agreements with the United States, a re-focusing of Moscow's economic agenda, or a Sino-Russian conflict are all feasible situations that could interrupt Russian arms sales to China.

Finally, continued economic growth is essential to maintain the current pace of modernization. Just as the economies of Japan in the 1980s and the United States in the

1990s seemed unstoppable, the global financial crisis shows that even the most mature and robust economies are subject to larger market forces. If China's economic growth does not continue at its current pace, modernization efforts will be dramatically degraded for the PLA.

D. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TAIWAN

China's A2/AD strategy seems specifically designed to prevent U.S. involvement in the Taiwan Straits. With limited airlift and amphibious capabilities, the PLA may be even more concerned with U.S. intervention in the Straits than with Taiwan's independence politics which have slowed since the mid-1990s, anyway. American involvement in a future cross-straits conflict can directly challenge the CCP's ability to secure its borders and protect its people. Losing this challenge can embolden other anti-communist groups, encourage mass mobilization, and threaten the regime's authority.

This concern has been somewhat validated throughout history by U.S. support for the Republic of China and the KMT. By the third Taiwan Strait crisis, the United States had recognized the PRC over the ROC as the official government of China for only 15 years. Despite normalized diplomatic relations with Beijing and increasing bi-lateral trade arrangements, the United States still deployed carrier strike groups to the region to deter further military aggression by the PLA. Once again, the PRC was compelled to alter its treatment of Taiwan because of American military force. Shortly after the 1996 crisis, China acquired strike aircraft, destroyers, and submarines from Russia in order to mitigate America's carrier capability in future conflicts. This accelerated acquisition plan was the genesis of China's current A2/AD strategy.

If the United States represents a major security threat to China, America's ability to intervene in the Taiwan Strait is arguably its most threatening aspect. However, the CCP leadership was not the only group concerned with American interference in the Straits. As China rises, so does a strong sense of national pride and unity. This nationalism is deliberately encouraged by the Chinese government when mutual interests align and quickly prohibited when they do not. Following the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by NATO forces, the Chinese government encouraged

student protests of the United States and even provided transportation to facilitate mass demonstrations. However, once the protesters began to criticize the CCP's handling of the situation, the protests were quickly ended and the crowds immediately dispersed.

In China, nationalism is a powerful and dangerous force that is gaining momentum. In a Taiwan Strait conflict, nationalism could be the key variable that determines the next outcome. Understandably, most mainland Chinese disapprove of U.S. military interference in the Strait, regardless of how justified or reasonable the United States thinks its action is. If national pride unites the Chinese people behind their government, then the PRC may find itself with sufficient political will to resist American pressure. However, if nationalism rallies the people against their government, then domestic and international pressure could create a crisis from which the PRC leadership might not recover. Obviously a quick, decisive victory is the best solution for the PRC in another Taiwan Strait conflict and is therefore a major reason why the PLA has adopted its current strategy.

E. CONCLUSION

Impressive economic growth has naturally led to the development of modern military systems and equipment. In order to resolve territorial conflicts quickly and favorably along China's borders and critical sea lanes, especially in the Taiwan Strait, the PLA is developing a comprehensive strategy to affect key terrain by maximizing technology and leveraging information systems. However, even with continued development of sophisticated and capable weapons, the PLA faces real challenges in the modernization and professionalization of its military forces.

Inexperience, a narrow range of military operations, and tenuous civil-military relationships all degrade the PLA's ability to modernize. Without significant regional partnerships, the capability of the PLA remains limited. A strategy of A2/AD impedes military diplomacy and reduces the ability of the PLA to create alliances or partnerships. Over the long term, a comprehensive strategy of A2/AD may be too successful and leave China isolated in the region without important friends or alliances.

While it is understandable that Beijing desires multipolarity over American hegemony, checking the influence of the United States could be dangerous and costly. In a world of ever-increasing globalization, isolation would surely affect China's economy and could bring about an internal crisis for resources. Paradoxically, the greatest threat to the PLA may be its own strategic proficiency.



Figure 2. China's Group Armies (From: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008).



Figure 3. China's Air Forces (From: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008).



Figure 4. China's Naval Forces (From: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008).



Figure 5. China's Power Projection in the Western Pacific (From: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2009).

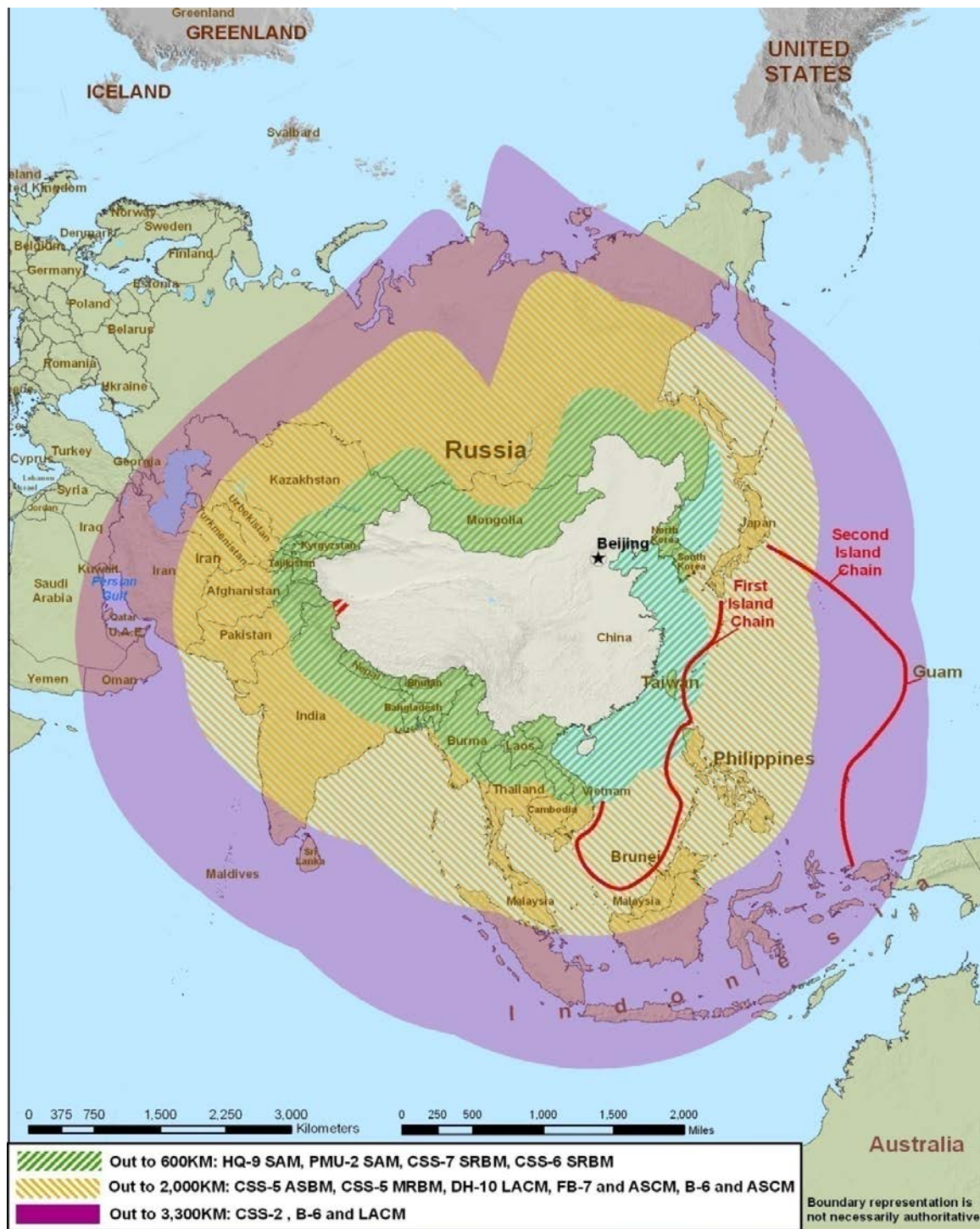


Figure 6. China's Conventional Reach (From: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008).

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IV. CONCLUSION

China's rise is naturally provocative to the United States given its position as the dominant power in the region. This does not necessarily mean that conflict is inevitable, just that the impact of perceptions is amplified. Both China and the United States have imperfect track records managing perceptions throughout Asia. Mutual misperceptions and mistrust between the two countries make it difficult to address important regional issues like North Korea's aggression, mineral rights in the South China Sea, and cross-Strait relationships. Before misperceptions cause both countries to inadvertently cross a security threshold, it is important to assess the implications of China's military modernization program and review available options for America's security posture in Asia.

A. IMPLICATIONS

The most important and obvious implication of China's military modernization program is that the United States must either develop anti-A2/AD capabilities or accept a more limited security role in Asia. A weak China means that the United States can more easily rely on military force and economic power to exert its influence. As China rises economically and militarily, the United States must pay more attention to its policies and actions in the region and especially those that affect China specifically.

This is already happening. America's response to China's A2/AD strategy is the air-sea battle concept. Based on the air-land battle concept developed in Europe during the Cold War, air-sea battle is designed to defeat those capabilities that limit freedom of action in the Western Pacific. What is startling is that this emerging strategy is explicit in its application against the PLA. Typically, U.S. military doctrine is written in generalities so it can apply to similar threats from various sources. Air-sea battle is different in that it is designed to counter one specific adversary, and that it states unambiguously who that adversary is. Moreover, it is designed to counter an opponent that has not even been declared adversarial by the U.S. leadership.

Neither China's strategy of A2/AD nor America's strategy of air-sea battle should be surprising or unexpected. The PRC has always balanced against the dominant power in the region and altered its defense strategy to deal with perceived threats. The United States has been the world's only superpower for over 20 years now and has repeatedly used its primacy to project its power across the globe. The 1991 Gulf War highlighted the prowess of America's military technology and coalition building ability, while the 2003 invasion of Iraq demonstrated an American willingness to occupy a sovereign country unilaterally if needed. Meanwhile, the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis reinforced America's resolve to intervene in cross-Strait politics, a resolve that is continually reiterated to the PRC through U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. In this context, a strategy that relies on mainly defensive weaponry and tactics seems to be the rational choice. Since China balances against hegemony and changes its defense strategy to deal with perceived threats, a strategy of A2/AD is fairly predictable.

On the other hand, predictability does not make China's strategy any less provocative to the United States. Not only is the scope and pace of China's rise alarming by itself, but the adoption of a strategy that is specifically designed to counter American influence is inherently confrontational. America's emerging strategy is a logical attempt to retain its influence in the region. According to the concept's authors:

A 'roll-back' of the PLA's military power is not the objective here. Nor is containment of China proposed. Rather, we advocate simply offsetting the PLA's unprovoked and unwarranted military buildup.⁴⁶

Prior to the Korean War, the Truman Administration also dismissed the idea of rollback, and the Korean Peninsula was considered to be outside the area of containment. In fact, General MacArthur was issued specific instructions to halt his advance if he thought Chinese or Soviet troops were involved. Despite these efforts deliberately designed to prevent conflict, tens of thousands of Americans were killed, and hundreds of thousands of Chinese. All of this is to show that even though both countries are

⁴⁶ Jan van Tol et al, *AirSea Battle, A Point of Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), 12.

advancing strategies that they consider to be reasonable, appropriate, and un-provocative, perceptions are a natural and important side effect of military strategy.

B. OPTIONS

1. Status Quo

Air-sea battle is still conceptual in nature but there are signs that it will receive favorable endorsement from senior military leaders and become official policy soon. This strategy is attractive because it emphasizes America's technological advantage and focuses on space and cyberspace domains instead of relying primarily on costly and dangerous troop deployments. America's tolerance for massive troop deployments has been waning since the war on terror began in 2001. Furthermore, air-sea battle offers a realistic counter to China's emerging strategy of A2/AD. Certainly America's allies would support this strategy because they could continue to free-ride without providing additional large bases or territory.

However, the status quo and the air-sea battle concept face certain problems. First, just as China's A2/AD strategy seems provocative to the United States, a strategy that is specifically aimed at the western Pacific reinforces China's perception of the United States as a major security threat. Economic interdependence may prevent another Cold War, but China's increasing access to military technologies, emphasis on research and development, and mutual misperceptions could lead to an arms race. Misperceptions combined with weapons proliferation could lead to expensive outcomes for both countries. Whereas both strategies seek to deter the other from aggression, neither is well suited to address perceptions or facilitate engagement.

The second obstacle faced by the U.S. military is an increasing competition over resources within the military. A constant dilemma for military leaders is to focus on increasing and improving legacy systems, which air-sea battle calls for, or to shift resources to combating irregular warfare. On one hand, irregular warfare, including counter-insurgency operations, appears to be increasing in frequency, complexity, and severity. On the other hand, conventional threats, like those found in China's A2/AD

strategy, are less common but potentially more dangerous for U.S. interests abroad and arguably more appropriate for the current force structure of the U.S. military anyway. As budgetary constraints amplify the competition for resources, air–sea battle may become more difficult to employ.

Finally, the air–sea battle concept is expensive. Even if DoD adopts this policy over irregular warfare and endorses it for use within the western Pacific, air–sea battle calls for additional research and development investments along with industrial production. At a time when the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs describes the national debt as America’s biggest security threat, it is somewhat difficult to justify an increase in system design and industrial production. Recent program cancellations like the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle and the secondary F-35 engine highlight DoD’s apprehension for expensive legacy system upgrades.

2. Increased Presence

Although almost every U.S. politician describes the debt as a critical problem these days, there is little consensus on what the impact should be on military operations abroad. Robert Kagan of the Brookings Institute argues that:

American forces deployed in East Asia and the Western Pacific have for decades prevented the outbreak of major war, provided stability, and kept open international trading routes, making possible an unprecedented era of growth and prosperity for Asians and Americans alike. Now the United States faces a new challenge and potential threat from a rising China which seeks eventually to push the U.S. military’s area of operations back to Hawaii and exercise hegemony over the world’s most rapidly growing economies. If the United States cannot provide that assurance because it is cutting back its military capabilities, they will have to choose between accepting Chinese dominance and striking out on their own, possibly by building nuclear weapons.⁴⁷

For Kagan, and many others in Washington, America’s global military presence has been the key to prosperity for the past 65 years and should therefore be exempted

⁴⁷ Robert Kagan, “The Price of Power,” *The Weekly Standard* (24 Jan 2011), http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/price-power_533696.html.

from budget cuts not only because of the security risks involved, but also because of the growth and prosperity provided by open international trade routes.

Increasing America's presence in East Asia would be somewhat difficult without a compelling reason for the United States to do so. Although America's allies largely support the U.S. military's presence, few are eager to sacrifice territory for bases. America's largest bases in Japan and Korea required wars to obtain. The Philippines, for example, will not reopen either the U.S. naval base at Subic Bay or Clark Air Base without a severe and imminent threat from a common enemy. Increasing America's presence in the region could deter China from becoming that common enemy, or it could provoke China into an arms race.

Since China balances against hegemony and alters its defense strategy to deal with perceived threats, the PRC will seek out any available multilateral institutions and advance a defense strategy that restricts America's freedom of movement. If U.S. military presence increases, the PRC will seek to interfere with U.S. alliances, utilize soft power wherever possible, and continue to develop capabilities and doctrine designed to disrupt America's freedom of movement. As long as China's economic growth remains strong and it perceives the United States as a threat, these initiatives will accelerate as American presence is increased.

3. Decreased Presence

If increasing America's presence risks provoking China, decreasing America's presence risks emboldening China. Among other factors, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula may have emboldened the communists into thinking that the United States would not defend it. One of the reasons that the Korean War was so costly in terms of blood and treasure is because the Truman Administration aggressively reduced the size of the military after WWII, and was forced to build back up at the outset of the war. A similar concern exists today in the context of a rising China amongst a backdrop of declining American prosperity. Many Americans feel that it is better to have a large forward deployed military force and not need it, than to need a large forward deployed military force and not have it. However, to use Kagan's argument, if the United

States reduces its presence in East Asia, America's allies might strike out on their own accord and therefore share the burden of regional security costs. In fact, decreasing America's forward presence and regional involvement may be the only way to encourage regional partners to burden share security responsibilities. Ironically, a decreased presence could actually improve regional security by forcing America's allies to take a more active role in their defense.

One of the strengths of China's A2/AD strategy is that the United States has provided the PLA with large, vulnerable, high-payoff targets. Not only are the bases on Japan targetable, but so are the +1,000ft aircraft carriers that continuously patrol the area. Many of the legacy systems like aircraft carriers can be countered with Chinese weapons like the DF-21D missile, while large U.S. bases in Japan and South Korea can be attacked with missiles and short range strike aircraft. Mines, missiles, submarines and strike aircraft are all relatively cheap and easy to build weapons that can inflict a lot of pain on U.S. forces currently used in the region.

4. A New Approach

The United States should invest in anti-A2/AD systems while it still has a substantial advantage in sophisticated military technology. Developing smaller platforms that employ unmanned aircraft, along with surface and subsurface unmanned systems could help restore America's freedom of movement in the Western Pacific without a large buildup of easily targetable personnel. Best of all, the continued use of unmanned systems throughout Operation Enduring Freedom, especially in Pakistan, highlights the importance of these systems to the competing interests of an irregular warfare strategy. The dual-use nature of these types of systems makes unmanned vehicles a critical component of future U.S. military doctrine and strategy.

A dispersal of U.S. bases could mitigate a key advantage in China's strategy and promote burden sharing while encouraging fiscal austerity. Best of all, there is already a template for this. Revising the regional basing policy throughout Asia can be accomplished by constructing a network of cooperative security locations (CSLs) which are smaller, host nation supported facilities reserved for American forces that can expand

when needed.⁴⁸ By closing down major bases in Japan and Korea, regional allies will be encouraged to take a more active role in providing for their own security. Meanwhile, maintaining a network of CSLs would provide the U.S. the ability to rapidly scale nodal centers of support to more appropriately fit the current situation on the ground.

During times of peace, CSLs would be minimally staffed and maintain only the necessary equipment for routine operations. During a crisis, as forces deploy from the U.S. as needed, the CSLs increase in size, capacity, and throughput. Creating the ability to adjust capacity and throughput in key locations to compensate for the current situation is simply more efficient than maintaining large bases indefinitely. Although the speed of a U.S. response would be reduced, this reduction would encourage burden sharing among regional partners and allies. The United States can maintain a hard-power edge by leveraging technology and promoting burden sharing while advancing soft power initiatives by reducing its conventional military footprint in the region.

Finally, empowering China to take a more active role in Asia's security is in America's interest because of the shared interests and mutual threats faced by each country. Both countries want security, stability, and economic prosperity. Both countries oppose terrorism, piracy, WMD proliferation, and radical Islam. A stronger regional security role for China might make some of America's allies nervous, but a moderate apprehension could promote burden sharing while increasing the importance of a friendly relationship with the United States. As long as America retains the strongest economy and military on the planet, it will remain the critical component of Asia's security even if its footprint is reduced.

Most importantly, the U.S. military can serve as an example for China to emulate. The PLA wants to modernize and the U.S. can shape their development through combined military operations and exercises. As America's footprint is reduced through a combination of technological innovation and revised basing practices, the remaining force structure can be revised and reassigned. Force reductions can be made wherever appropriate and reassignment to a mission of military diplomacy can have a critical

⁴⁸ Defense Technical Information Center, definition of Information Operations, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/c/18918.html>.

impact on shaping the PLA and Sino-U.S. relations. Engagement on this level will not only shed light onto the PLA's capabilities, doctrine, and intentions, but will also reduce tensions and eventually facilitate the emergence of a powerful regional ally.

5. Perspective on China's Threat

Concerns over China's rise are understandable but seem somewhat over exaggerated. A worst-case scenario where China becomes a regional hegemon and attempts to limit U.S. influence beyond an acceptable threshold would be counterproductive not only to China's soft-power message of a peaceful rise, but also to its economy which serves as the guarantor of regime security domestically.

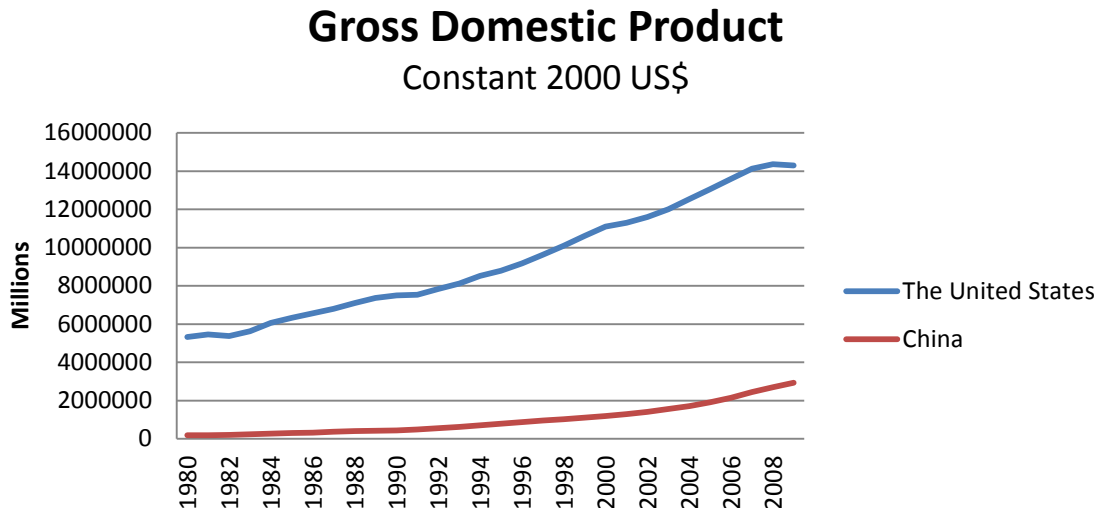


Figure 7. Gross Domestic Product (After: The World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org>).

Although China's rise over the past three decades has been impressive, its economic power in both absolute and relative terms is still far behind the United States. China's GDP of \$4.9 trillion is still only roughly one-third of the size of America's \$14.8 trillion.⁴⁹ However, per capita GDP between the two countries is arguably even more telling. America's \$40,000 per capita GDP is ten times bigger than China's per

⁴⁹ The World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD/countries/US-CN?display=graph>. Amounts are approximate.

capita GDP of only \$4,000. Although the income of most Chinese has certainly increased in recent years, many Chinese remain in poverty. In other words, America's economic power is three times bigger than China's, and, on average, Americans are ten times wealthier than Chinese. All of this may oversimplify the economic situation between the two countries; however, these numbers are mainly intended to show the considerable gap between the largest economy in the world and China's admirable second-place ranking.

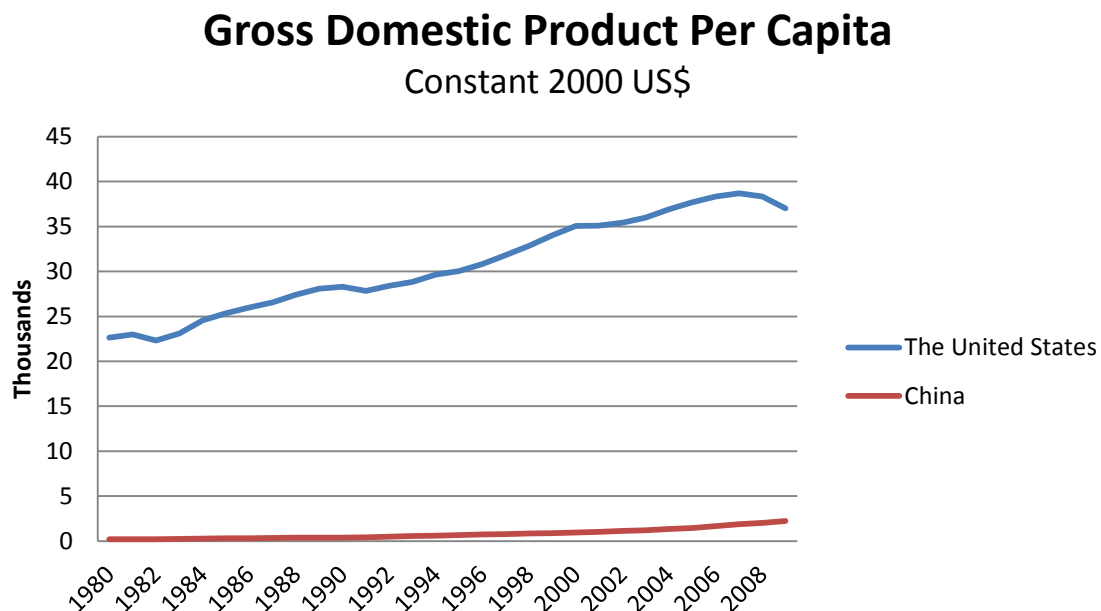


Figure 8. Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (After: The World Bank, <http://databank.worldbank.org>).

Likewise, China's military modernization program has made great strides recently, but still lags far behind the capabilities of the United States. China has nuclear weapons but they are small in quantity and have inefficient and vulnerable delivery systems. Although the PLAN is developing an aircraft carrier, it still lacks the infrastructure to train pilots, build or maintain deployable aircraft, or the expertise to plan and execute operations. The PLAAF may have designed a stealth aircraft, or they may have designed something that only looks like a stealth aircraft. Either way, the

experience of employing sophisticated weaponry is a major factor in planning and executing military campaigns and is largely absent from many planners and commanders in the Chinese military today.

The acquisition of expensive equipment does not necessarily directly translate into military proficiency. Just as new shoes on an opponent pose little threat to a professional basketball player during a game, China's military acquisition program is only part of its overall modernization program and poses little threat to the world's only superpower. Furthermore, the United States is not complacent toward China's rise and will continue to adapt and improve its own military.

Without important alliances beyond China's periphery, the PLA will not be able to project power in a manner that could counter America's military or threaten America's key interests. The United States has an extensive alliance network and treaties in force with almost every country on the planet. Recent history has shown that the United States can rely on important allies like England, Germany, and Japan, as well as robust coalitions like NATO, to support long-term military conflicts. In the western Pacific, Japan, South Korea, and Australia are just a few examples of reliable and important U.S. allies. Meanwhile, China's relationship with North Korea seems to be more of a liability than an asset. China's other important potential allies like Russia, ASEAN, and SCO-member countries all have economic and security interests with the United States as well. Whereas America has a proven, albeit imperfect, history of coalition building during recent military conflicts, China's last conflict coalition was in the Korean War.

America's unrivaled military strength is the result of a combination of sophisticated technology, constant operational experience, and a global presence through extensive alliances, partnerships, and agreements. America's reach is global and its military is powerful. As China strives to attain international prestige and influence, America continues to innovate, improve and adapt as well. Although China's rise has certainly been impressive, America's sustained international importance also deserves an appropriate level of acknowledgement.

6. Conclusion

China's increasing economic and military strength elevates its significance to the United States. A stated desire for multipolarity, an alliance with Russia, a demonstrated tendency to balance against the strongest power, and a strategy of A2/AD all indicate that China seeks to challenge America's security posture in Asia. However, Beijing does not want and cannot afford a direct confrontation with the United States.

Arguably the worst-case scenario for China would be an actual military conflict with the United States because of the negative impact on trade, its economy, regional relationships, and the price of the conflict itself. The consequences for a comprehensive defeat in the Taiwan Strait are different for China than they are for the United States. The United States withstood a withdrawal from Vietnam, and President Clinton was even re-elected to a second term after withdrawing from Somalia. Although a military defeat in the Straits would certainly be harmful to U.S. interests, it could be catastrophic for the PRC.

The CCP is constantly concerned with social movements within its borders and understands that stability must be maintained in order to prevent massive social movements from challenging its authority. Conflict with the United States would almost certainly interfere with China's economic growth and degrade the state's ability to secure and control its population. While a military defeat would be embarrassing and costly for the United States, a defeat could lead to a challenge of authority for the CCP.

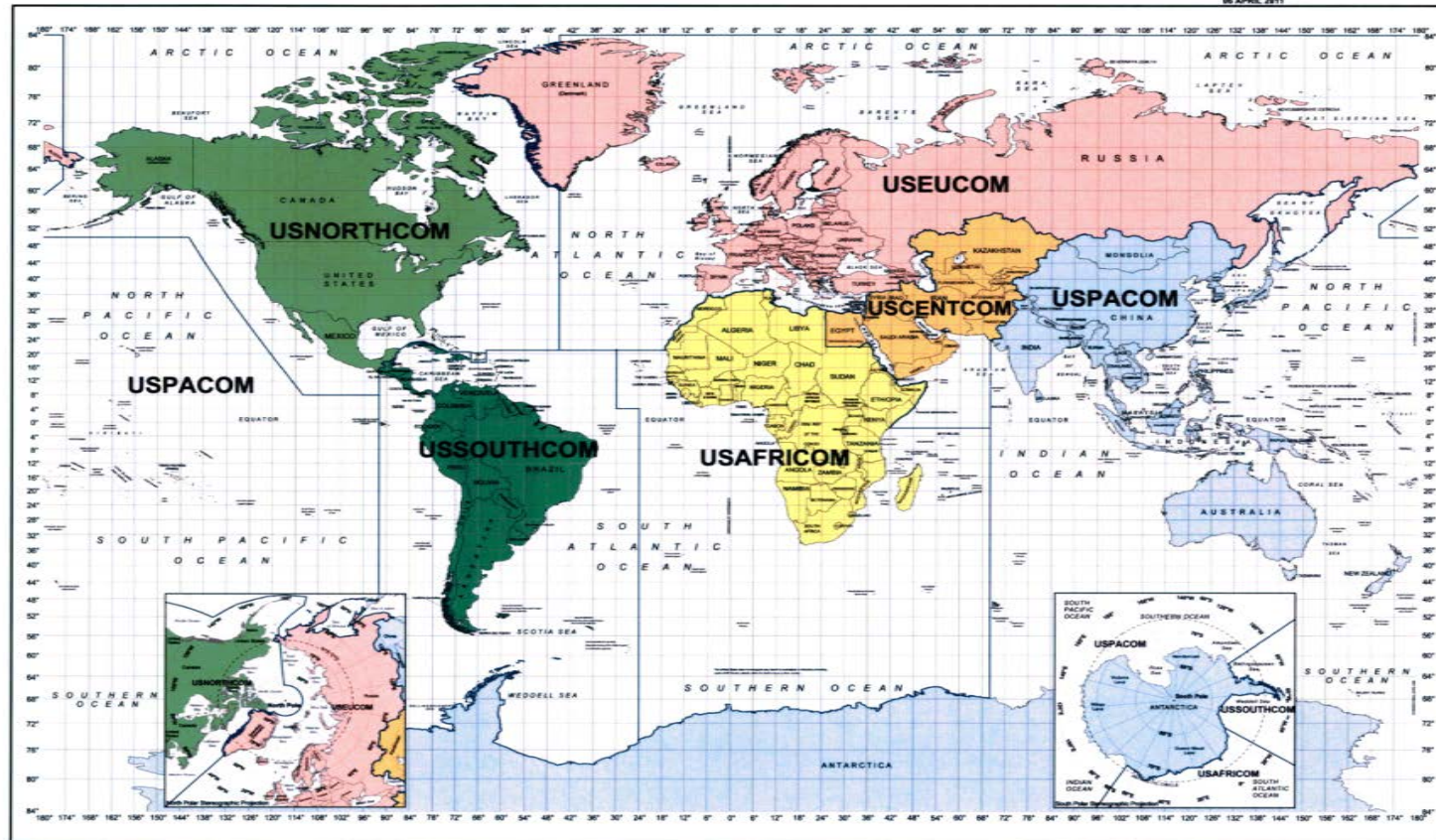
An outright conflict would have a negative effect on both countries but would have far greater impacts on China from which the regime might not recover. If Beijing's threat perception of America is driving PLA modernization efforts, then America's actions and policies necessarily have a profound effect on shaping China's defense strategy. This gives America an incredible opportunity to influence the strategic development of both countries. The challenge for the United States is not how to best counter the marginal threat from the PLA, but rather how to capitalize on the inherent opportunities available during China's rise.

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MAP EFFECTIVE 06 APRIL 2011

USNORTHCOM
USSOUTHCOM
USEUCOM
USCENTCOM
USPACOM
USAFRICOM

1:60,000,000
MILLER CYLINDRICAL PROJECTION

* West Bank and Gaza Strip - "Israel-occupied with current status subject to the Israel - Palestinian Interim Agreement - permanent status to be determined through further negotiations"

THE REPRESENTATION OF BOUNDARIES
IS NOT NECESSARILY AUTHENTICATIVE

Figure 9. Regional Combatant Commands of the United States (From: Department of Defense, http://www.defense.gov/news/UCP_2011_Map4.pdf).

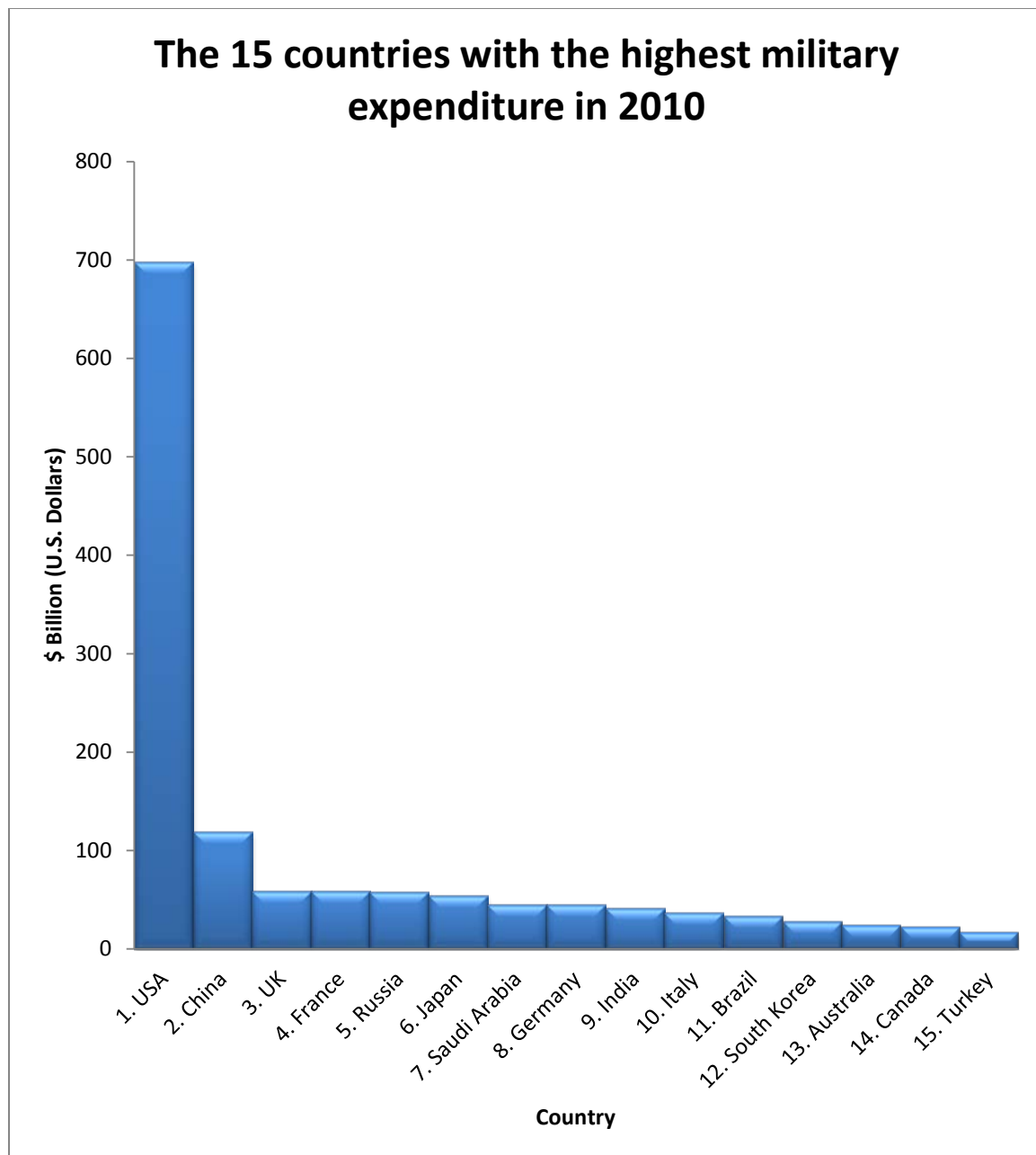


Figure 10. The 15 Countries With the Highest Military Expenditure in 2010 (After: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2010*).

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